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# MONTANA ADVISORY COUNCIL

GOVERNANCE OF MONTANA'S  
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

April, 1976

**For  
Vocational Education**

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GOVERNANCE OF MONTANA'S  
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

April, 1976



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montana  
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March 31, 1976

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

During the past eighteen months the Advisory Council has given considerable study and effort toward a revised governance structure for vocational education in Montana.

With the specific desire to offer recommendations which the Council feels are valid and appropriate we have conducted an extensive review of the Montana vocational education system. This report is a culmination of that review and is submitted to all interested persons, agencies, boards and groups. It is the thinking of the Council that the following information will support the three recommendations found in Part 3.

The Council respectfully offers this report in response to a long standing concern relative to the adequacy of the present state governance system of vocational education and its capability to provide the services to meet the needs and desires of Montana's citizens and the state's manpower. In that context we submit this report for public consideration.

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## C O N T E N T S

### Letter of Transmittal

Council Membership	i
Introduction	1
Part 1 A History	2
Part 2 The Governance Problems	11
Part 3 Recommendations	16
Bibliography	18



## GOVERNANCE OF MONTANA'S VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

## INTRODUCTION

The quality of vocational education instruction offered to secondary, postsecondary, and adult students in Montana is generally good. However, because of extensive growth accompanied by limited planning and direction, the vocational education system has not achieved its full potential in serving the people of Montana. In order to achieve this potential it is imperative that the state define the goals for vocational education and set up a delivery system which is designed to attain these goals.

One of the major stumbling blocks which keeps the system from achieving its full potential is the governmental structure itself. The governance structure as it exists today is a hindrance rather than a help to the system; administrative authority is vested in many different boards at many different levels making coherent planning and coordination a virtual impossibility.

The vocational education advisory council thinks that in order to serve the people well, we must use our vocational education resources as efficiently as possible. In order to do this we must have a well governed system. The Council has studied extensively the problem of vocational education governance in Montana. This report is a summary of the history of vocational education in Montana, a discussion of the problems of governance and recommendations of the Council.



## PART 1 A HISTORY

Federal legislation triggered real growth in vocational education throughout the nation, and Montana was no exception. Before passage of the Vocational Education Act of 1963, vocational education in Montana consisted of scattered vocational agriculture, home economics and trade and industrial programs at the secondary level. A few postsecondary programs were conducted by Northern Montana College and the Helena public schools and some schools offered adult vocational education. After passage of the 1963 act a postsecondary vocational school was completed in Helena and in 1968 construction was underway on schools in Missoula and Butte.

Responding to the changing occupational needs of an increasingly more complex technological society, Congress in 1968 amended the Vocational Education Act of 1963. These amendments, known as VEA'68 (Public Law 90-576) generated real growth in vocational education so that by the 1974-1975 school year there were 31,653 secondary and 4,805 postsecondary students enrolled in vocational education programs in Montana.

## THE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AMENDMENTS OF 1968 (PUBLIC LAW 90-576)

By the passage of the Vocational Education Amendments of 1968 Congress extended vocational education opportunities so that persons of all ages in all communities would have ready access to high quality vocational education. The Act defines vocational education as training for gainful employment which requires less than a baccalaureate degree.



It authorizes extensive financial grants to states for the support of vocational education programs providing that states:

1. designate a sole state agency for the administration of vocational education.
2. annually submit long range program plans for vocational education which take into consideration job opportunities, geographical distribution of vocational education opportunities, employment opportunities, specific needs of disadvantaged and handicapped students, costs, etc. The plan must also provide assurance that federal funds are used to supplement rather than supplant state and local funds.
3. establish an advisory council for vocational education.

Since vocational education traditionally occurs at many levels and in many types of institutions, e.g. high schools, postsecondary vocational schools, community colleges, and universities, the law required a sole state agency for the administration of vocational education so that vocational education programs could be properly planned and coordinated.

#### MONTANA VOCATIONAL EDUCATION LEGISLATION 1969

In response to the Vocational Education Amendments of 1968 the legislature in 1969 passed an omnibus act (H.B. 481) designating five postsecondary vocational-technical centers in Billings, Butte, Helena, Great Falls, and Missoula. The Act:

1. established the Board of Education as the sole state agency for governing vocational education (as required by Public Law 90-576);
2. re-designated the Superintendent of Public Instruction as Executive Officer for Vocational Education;



3. enabled any school district, community college or unit of the Montana University system to establish vocational courses which would be eligible for state or federal vocational education funds on approval of the Board of Education;
4. set up the sources of financing vocational education: legislative appropriation, federal funds and a 1 mill county wide levy in all counties where postsecondary vocational-technical centers are located;<sup>1</sup>
5. allowed postsecondary vocational-technical centers to charge fees for equipment and material but prohibited tuition for Montana residents.

#### COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEGISLATION

The 1971 legislature changed the method of financing community colleges replacing state school equalization aid with direct state appropriations.<sup>2</sup> Revenue for operating budgets was to come from three sources:

1. state appropriations,
2. a 3 mill levy on the community college district,
3. student tuition.

Creation of a new community college district would henceforth require approval from the board of regents and the legislature. Operation of the community colleges would remain with the seven member board

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<sup>1</sup>Amended in 1973 to allow high school districts to furnish up to fifty percent of construction costs for new postsecondary facilities.

<sup>2</sup>Dawson College, Glendive; Flathead Valley Community College, Kalispell; Miles Community College, Miles City.



elected from the community college district under the supervision of the Board of Regents.

Approval of vocational education courses remained with the Board of Education (Board of Public Education after 1973) in order to coordinate all vocational education programs and to fulfill the requirements of the federal law.

In 1975 the legislature set a 65:35 ratio of state to local funds for the operating budgets of the community colleges. The local mill levy was made flexible depending upon revenue from student tuition and state appropriations.

#### THE 1972 MONTANA CONSTITUTION

The Executive Article of the 1972 Montana Constitution continued the Superintendent of Public Instruction as an elected official, with "such duties as are provided by law."

The Constitution also replaced the Board of Education with a Board of Regents of Higher Education and a Board of Public Education which together comprise the State Board of Education "responsible for long-range planning, for coordinating and evaluating policies and programs for the state's educational system," and provided that "it shall submit unified budget requests." The Constitution assigns the government and control of the University System to the Board of Regents and the general supervision of the public school system to the Board of Public Education. It was left to the legislature to designate which of the boards should



govern the community colleges and the postsecondary vocational-technical centers. In 1973 the legislature placed the community colleges under the Board of Regents and all vocational education under the Board of Public Education. Vocational education courses taught in the community colleges and the universities must also be approved and funded by the Board of Public Education.

#### THE COMMISSION ON POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

In 1973 the Montana legislature created the Montana Commission on Postsecondary Education and directed it to "make a detailed and thorough study of postsecondary education in the state." Even though the charge for the Commission was broad, its mandate was confined to postsecondary education and therefore was not ideally suited to the study of the total vocational education delivery system—a system which exists at different levels of education and in different types of educational institutions. It runs from the elementary school where children need vocational awareness programs, extends through high school into postsecondary vocational-technical centers, community colleges and in some instances into the university system.

The Commission confined itself to a discussion of the governance of the five postsecondary vocational-technical centers. It identified a number of problems in the governance of the centers:

Budget and program control are at the state board and superintendent level while administrative responsibility is in the hands of the local board and of center directors responsible to the local board.



The taxpayers in the counties where the centers are located pay a one-mill levy to support the centers, despite the fact that the centers are charged with serving the entire state (as opposed to local or regional service areas.)

This, along with the administrative authority of the school district, makes for a strong element of local control. The county levy also raises questions of equity: should the county in which a center with statewide service function is located pay a special tax? If so, should the same logic apply to counties with other state oriented postsecondary institutions (e.g. units of the University System)?

The superintendent, an elected official, is the state board's executive officer for vocational education. While this situation has the advantage of providing a source of independent staff advice for the board, it also has the potential of creating management and accountability problems, particularly if philosophical or other differences between the superintendent and the board should develop.

Partly because of these structural problems, the vocational-technical centers have not achieved their full potential as a state system serving statewide needs. Rather than operating as a system the centers function as a loose federation of schools coordinated by the Board of Public Education and the Superintendent, whose role tends to be more that of referee than of policy initiator. Three examples will illustrate this point.

While legal responsibility for planning rests with the Board of Public Education, the planning which has taken place so far consists mostly of adjudicating disputes over locally initiated requests for programs, funds and facilities. In effect, planning by the board is short-term and reactive. There is little evidence of efforts to identify long-range statewide needs.

The Board and Superintendent play a similar refereeing role in the budgetary process. There



is no attempt to develop policy guidelines (other than those specified by law) or priorities in advance of budget request submission by the centers. The budgetary process, therefore is locally initiated. At the Superintendent and board level, there is an attempt to reach some kind of consensus among the centers and the superintendent's staff regarding the allocation of funds, particularly of new funds. The result of this process is that decisions tend to be based upon compromises between institutional interests and aspirations rather than careful evaluation of state needs and priorities.

While there are uniform policies which have been promulgated by the Board or the Superintendent over the years, they have never been compiled systematically in a policy manual. Such a manual is basic to sound administration. Its absence creates confusion and, often unnecessary perceptions of arbitrary treatment. Also, without a manual, it is difficult for the Board to systematically reevaluate old policies and directives.

The current governance of the vo-tech centers resembles governance of the University System in the 1960's. Planning and budgeting react to local, and often, parochial pressures. The approach is barely adequate to a growing system in which the major issues revolve around who will get what. If need arises for substantial program cutbacks because of decreased enrollments or funding, there is no evident capacity for making such decisions on a selective and qualitative basis. The system will contract or stabilize the same way it grew-- by institutional consensus and political compromise.

The major point concerning vocational-technical centers is that policy initiative is primarily at the local level in the hands of the local administrators responsible to the local board which is responsible to local taxpayers. The vocational-technical centers have not fully realized their potential as a state system serving statewide needs. This is not a matter of incompetence or of individuals not doing their jobs, but rather of pressures and counter-pressures created by a fragmented system of governance.<sup>1</sup>

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Montana Commission on Postsecondary Education, Draft Report.  
(Bozeman: 1974) p. 32.



Even though the problem of planning and coordination of vocational education in secondary schools, community colleges and university units was discussed by the Commission, no solution was arrived at.

It recommended leaving the vocational-technical centers as a cooperative local-state system with the Board of Public Education as the designated Board for Vocational Education. The only substantial change recommended was to repeal the statutory designation of the Superintendent of Public Instruction as executive officer for vocational education. The recommendation read:

The Board of Public Education should employ from among qualified applicants, the executive officer for vocational education. The executive officer should employ an administrative staff.<sup>1</sup>

#### HOUSE BILL 566

House Bill 566, introduced in the 1975 legislature by Representative Jack Gunderson, Chairman of the House Education Committee, embodied the recommendations on the governance of vocational education of the Montana Advisory Council on Vocational Education. The bill provided that:

1. the State Board of Education (the combined boards of Regents and Public Education) would be designated as the Board for Vocational Education.
2. from the Board of Education the Governor would appoint an

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<sup>1</sup>Montana Commission on Postsecondary Education, Final Report, (Bozeman: 1974) p.31.



administrative committee of 3 members of the Board of Public Education and 2 members of the Board of Regents.

3. the administrative committee would employ the executive officer for vocational education.
4. on behalf of the administrative committee the executive officer for vocational education would administer all state and federal laws related to vocational education.
5. the executive officer would employ the staff necessary for the state supervision and administration of Vocational Education and the directors of the five postsecondary vocational-technical centers.

The Board of Public Education challenged the constitutionality of the law in the Montana Supreme Court. The Court found the law unconstitutional on the grounds that the State Board of Education's functions are limited to long range planning, coordination and evaluation and do not extend to administering vocational education.



## PART 2 THE GOVERNANCE PROBLEMS

The problems of governance in the vocational education system that the Council finds most seriously in need of attention arise at least in part from the organizational structure of vocational education in Montana today. A unit of state government shares many of the characteristics of any other organization, and is or should be subject to the same principles which make for successful operation of any enterprise, whether industrial, commercial, religious, or governmental. The list found on page 13 summarizes some of the key principles of organization recognized by practitioners in the field of administration.

In contrast to these principles, the chart on page 14 shows the present structure and organization of vocational education governance in Montana. It graphically illustrates some of the confusion and conflict of authority and responsibility in the present system. The Superintendent of Public Instruction, an elected official, is responsible to the Board of Public Education, which must by law appoint the superintendent its executive officer for vocational education.

During the past year the position of coordinator of the five postsecondary vocational-technical centers was created. Initially the coordinator reported directly to the Board without responsibility to the Director of Vocational Education who is employed by the elected Superintendent of Public Instruction. The first postsecondary coordinator found it necessary to resign due to the confusion of this situation.

Vocational education funds in Montana are distributed to local



school districts, the five postsecondary vocational-technical centers, the three community colleges, the university system and adult vocational education. Administration of the vocational-technical centers is split between the Board of Public Education, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the local boards of trustees of the districts in which they are located. A similar split in authority is found between the Commissioner's office and the boards of trustees of the community colleges. The community colleges and universities are responsible to a Commissioner of Higher Education and the Board of Regents, resulting in further confusion in governance.

The chart cannot of course show where the most serious sources of conflict and confusion are to be found. The Advisory Council feels there are three major concerns. They are as follows:

1. THE CONFLICT BETWEEN DELIVERY SYSTEMS.

In order to achieve proper planning and coordination the Federal government, in providing funds for vocational education requires that the state name one board with sole responsibility for such programs. The 1975 Montana legislature tried to satisfy this requirement by designating as the "sole agency" the State Board of Education which includes the Board of Regents and the Board of Public Education. This solution was declared unconstitutional, which if anything intensified the confusion. The problem remains to be resolved.



Principles of Organization<sup>1</sup>

I. Objectives

The objectives of the enterprise and its component elements should be clearly defined and stated in writing. The organization should be kept simple and flexible.

II. Activities and Grouping

The responsibilities assigned to a position should be confined as far as possible to the performance of a single leading function.

III. Authority

There should be clear lines of authority running from the top to the bottom of the organization, and accountability from bottom to top.

The responsibility and authority of each position should be clearly defined in writing.

Accountability should always be coupled with corresponding authority.

Authority to take or initiate action should be delegated as close to the scene of action as possible.

The number of levels of authority should be kept to a minimum.

IV. Relationships

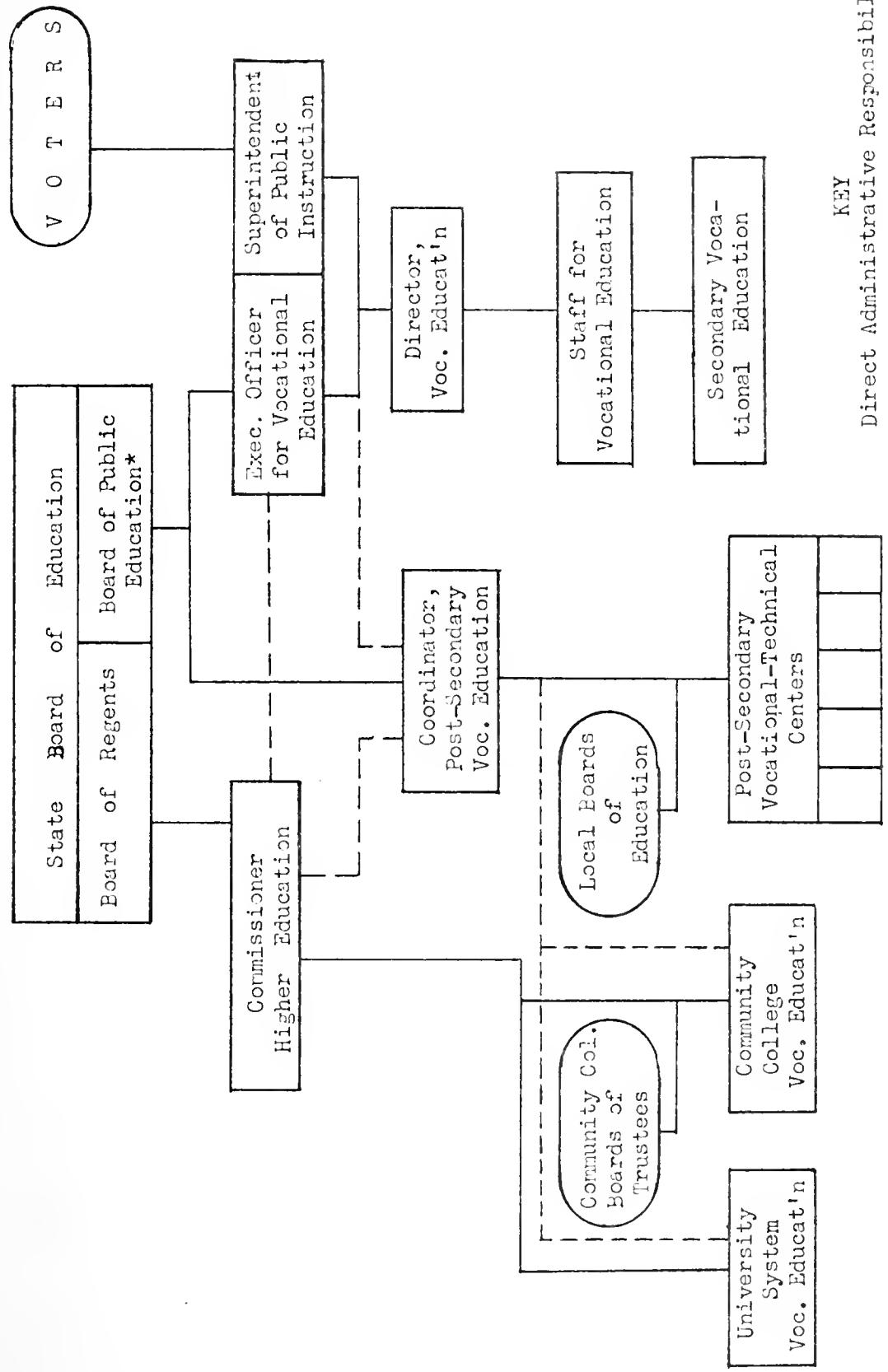
There is a limit to the number of positions that can be effectively supervised by a single individual. Everyone in the organization should report to only one supervisor.

The accountability of higher authority for the acts of its subordinates is absolute.

<sup>1</sup>Stieglitz, Harold. Organization Planning: Basic Concepts and Emerging Trends. A mimeographed report by 1962 National Industrial Conference Board, Inc.



FUNCTIONAL CHART OF VOCATIONAL  
EDUCATION IN MONTANA





2. CONFUSION AS TO THE ROLE AND AUTHORITY OF THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION.

Shown in the organization chart, the Superintendent of Public Instruction acts as the executive officer for vocational education, under the direction of the Board of Public Education. The chart also shows a coordinator of the five postsecondary vocational-technical centers, hired by and responsible to the Board of Public Education, and another officer, presumably responsible for all vocational education but reporting to the Superintendent. Under such a system it is difficult to follow "clear lines of authority running from the top to the bottom of the organization and accountability from bottom to top."

3. CONFUSION AS TO THE ROLE AND AUTHORITY OF LOCAL BOARD OF TRUSTEES IN RELATION TO THE FIVE POSTSECONDARY VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL CENTERS.

The postsecondary vocational-technical centers have been established by joint funding from federal, state, and local sources. Operational funds come from federal grants, state appropriations and a mandatory 1 mill levy by the county in which they are located. Since the postsecondary vocational-technical center system was designed to serve the needs of the state and not merely the areas in which they are located, there is inevitable conflict between the policies established by local administrative boards and those of the state board for vocational education.



## PART 3 RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the confusion and conflicts in the development of vocational education in the State of Montana, the requirements of both federal and state legislation, the consideration of proven principles of industrial organization, and after spending considerable time in reviewing the present situation, the pros and cons of various alternatives, the Montana Advisory Council for Vocational Education concludes a more effective delivery system of vocational education in Montana could result by adopting the following recommendations on governance.

RECOMMENDATION 1

The Board of Public Education is currently the legally designated board for vocational education. In order to satisfy the conditions specified in the legislature's recent attempt to deal with the problem of governance, the Council recommends that when this board acts in its capacity as the agency for vocational education, it should make a practice of conscious coordination with all facets of education including the public schools, the universities, and adult programs. Only in this way can the Board properly plan and coordinate all vocational education programs.

RECOMMENDATION 2

It is recommended that the legislature remove the requirement that the Superintendent of Public Instruction be the Board's



executive officer for vocational education. Instead, the Board of Public Education, acting in its capacity as governing agency for vocational education, should employ an executive officer who would then choose an appropriate staff.

RECOMMENDATION 3

The Council recommends, as it has in the past, that the postsecondary vocational-technical center system should be funded and administered by the state. Although this would, in districts containing a Vo-Tech Center, remove local school boards from administrative control over these centers, it would in no way remove the desirability and necessity for regular advice and assistance from local advisory councils in the operation of the centers.



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